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ABSTRACT

In 1864, President Lincoln was frustrated by the inability of Union Generals to defeat Robert E. Lee's forces. Lincoln looked to the western theater of the Civil War to find a winning leader, General Ulysses S. Grant. In March 1864, Grant took command of the entire Union army and began to wage a war of attrition to destroy Lee's army, its civilian system of support, and morale in the Confederacy. In May, Grant moved south and engaged the enemy continuously in a series of bloody battles. Regardless of casualties, Grant refused to back away from the action. On April 2, 1865 Grant began a twenty-mile assault that finally broke the Confederate forces. Heavy casualties, disease, desertions, hunger, and the relentless pursuit of Grant's army combined to sap the strength of General Lee's once formidable army. On April 9, Grant met Lee at Wilmer McCleans's farmhouse in Appomattox and arranged terms of surrender. In slightly more than one year, General Ulysses S. Grant had led Union forces to victory in the Civil War and began to carry out President Lincoln's compassionate treatment of the defeated South. From these efforts, a reunited nation would emerge. A chronology of main events in the life of Ulysses S. Grant is appended. (JP)

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GRANT CLOSES OUT THE WAR: 1864-65

by

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GRANT CLOSES OUT THE WAR: 1864-65

by Robert G. Lambert, Jr., Ph. D.

In early 1864, Abraham Lincoln faced a crucial dilemma -- if he were not reelected, he worried that the Civil War would end on Southern terms, and the Union would be dissolved. Yet the war in the East was deadlocked with the Union Army of the Potomac camped only a few miles from where it had been after the early battles of 1861. In short, Lincoln's generals, including Army of the Potomac commander George G. Meade, would not fight aggressively enough to bring about an end to the war or even gain a significant string of victories that would boost Lincoln's chances for reelection and for restoring the Union. Indeed, for a time early in 1862, Lincoln became directly involved with issuing commands and orders to the army, although he was untrained and uncomfortable at these tasks.

The war, however, had gone far better in the West -- then the area bordering the Mississippi and what we now call the Southeast. After early victories in 1862 with the captures of Fort Henry and Fort Donelson, Tennessee, which forced the Confederate evacuation of Kentucky and the loss of Nashville, General Ulysses S. Grant had compelled a Southern retreat at the bloody battle of Shiloh. Despite the high Union casualties leading to cries for Grant's

removal, Lincoln answered critics by saying, "I can't spare this man -- he fights!"

By the Fourth of July, 1863, Grant had maneuvered besieged Vicksburg into surrender, thus assuring Union control of the Mississippi while at the same time breaking the back of the Confederacy by cutting off the Trans-Mississippi West.

At almost exactly the same moment, General Meade's battered army failed to overtake Lee's Southern forces fleeing from defeat at Gettysburg. This allowed Lee to regroup, keep his Army of Northern Virginia intact, and continue the war.

In October, 1863, Grant was placed in command of the Western theater, and a month later he defeated General Braxton Bragg at the Battle of Chattanooga. A week after Grant's victory, Meade failed to turn Lee's flank at Mine Run in Virginia, thus ending offensive operations until the spring of 1864.

Lincoln now reached westward for a proven victor. In March, 1864, he summoned U. S. Grant to Washington to take command of the entire Union Army.

Up until the spring of 1862 and the viciously-fought Battle of Shiloh, Grant assumed the South would easily be cowed by a Union show of force. But at Shiloh both sides fought so fiercely (Grant took 13,047 casualties to 10,694 for the Confederacy) that the General realized that only total, brutal, unrelenting combat -- supplemented by the destruction of Southern crops and supplies --

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would bring the South to defeat. Grant termed it "complete conquest."

Now Grant had the power to wage total war -- a war of attrition aimed at destroying Lee's army, its civilian support system, and Southern morale in what Grant always referred to as "the so-called Confederacy." This recognition, not pure vindictiveness, explains why he ordered Sherman's scorched earth march to the sea through Georgia -- to destroy the Southern granary and starve out Lee's army. If an army travels on its stomach, it can also unravel through that same organ.

In May, after unifying his command so that all actions of the Union Army throughout the nation worked towards clear and related strategic goals, Grant plunged south, crossing Virginia's Rapidan River in an attempt to interpose Meade's army between Lee and Richmond, the Confederate capital. But the Union Army could not move quickly enough through an area of scrub and tangled thickets called "The Wilderness." Lee's army grappled with Grant's for two bloody days before Grant, deprived of artillery and cavalry, broke off and attempted to outrace Lee to the less obstructed ground of nearby Spotsylvania Courthouse, a road center crucial to both armies.

Lee barely beat him there and thus began the second part of the campaign: 14 blood-drenched days of heroism on both sides. On May 12th, Union forces broke through at a sector known as the "Bloody Angle." Rifle fire was so intense that mini-balls alone felled a

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22-inch oak tree. With both sides dazed by the slaughter, the Confederates finally withdrew to a second set of entrenchments.

In Campaigning with Grant, General Horace Porter of Grant's staff describes the most awesome carnage of any Civil War engagement:

> The opposing flags were in places thrust against each other, and muskets were fired with muzzle against muzzle. Skulls were crushed with clubbed muskets, and men stabbed to death with swords and bayonets thrust between the logs in the parapet which separated the combatants. Wild cheers, savage yells, and frantic shrieks rose above the sighing of the wind and the pattering of the rain, and formed a demonical accompaniment to the booming of the guns as they hurled their missiles of death...(The next day.) Our own killed were...piled on each other in some places four layers deep, exhibiting every ghastly phase of mutilation. Below the mass of fast-decaying corpses the convulsive twitching of limbs and the writhing of bodies showed that there were wounded men still alive and struggling to extricate themselves from their horrid entombment.

Prior to Grant's command, each time the Federal Army had been mauled, it would retreat to lick its wounds. This time Grant announced, "I propose to fight it out on this line if it takes all summer." Refusing to recognize semi-defeat, Grant ordered his troops to continue southwards. One legend tells of Grant astride his horse at a Virginia crossroads, indicating to his weary troops that they were to continue south by pointing the way with his inevitable cigar. The troops cheered, for this time they realized a

-MORE-

general meant business.

Continuing to pursue Lee's army, Grant made a mistake at Cold Harbor. In frustration, he ordered head-on charges against entrenched positions, resulting in terrible Federal casualties. Fourteen unsuccessful assaults left 7,200 Union dead and wounded. Years later, Grant wrote in his Memoirs, "I have always regretted that the last assault at Cold Harbor was ever made."

Slipping still southward, Grant's vanguard from General Butler's army almost succeeded in outflanking Lee's army at Petersburg and ending the war. But hastily assembled militia held the line until Lee arrived, and the siege of Petersburg began.

Grant continued to starve the South by ordering General Philip H. Sheridan's forces in the Shenandoah Valley to "Eat out Virginia clear and clean as far as they go, so that crows flying over it...will have to carry their provender with them."

A classical weapon from European sieges, rarely used in the Civil War, promised to breach the Petersburg line. By the end of July, 1864, ex-coal miners in the Northern army planted a gigantic mine beneath the Confederate line. On July 30th, the mine with 8,000 pounds of gunpowder blew up, creating a hole 170 feet long, 60 feet wide, and 30 feet deep.

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GRANT CLOSES OUT THE WAR

> Suddenly the earth trembled under our feet. An enormous mass sprung into the air...full of red flames...spread out like an immense mushroom whose stem seemed to be of fire and its head of smoke. Then everything appeared to break up and fall back in a rain of earth mixed with rocks, with beams, timbers, and mangled human bodies, leaving floating in the air a cloud of white smoke, which rose up in the heavens, and a cloud of grey dust, which fell slowly towards the earth.

But because of inept leadership, after Union troops entered the Crater, more refused to scale its walls on the enemy side, cowering in the false safety of its sides. They soon became "fish in a barrel" for Southern mortars and marksmen. About 1,000 Union troops died and 4,000 were taken prisoner. The war would now continue for another eight months.

Over the winter months of 1864-65, disease, hunger, and desertion continued to erode Lee's army, which became known as "Lee's Miserables."

Lee made a last, unsuccessful attempt to break through Grant's line, losing 4,500 men on March 25th. On the second of April, Grant opened a 20-mile wide frontal assault, finally breaking the Confederate lines.

Abandoning Petersburg and Richmond, Lee's eroded army tried to unite with the Army of Tennessee in North Carolina, but it was to be a forlorn hope. With his army exhausted and surrounded, Lee met

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7-7-7-7

GRANT CLOSES OUT THE WAR

Grant at Wilmer McLean's farmhouse in Appomattox on Palm Sunday, April 9th.

Grant's surrender terms were merciful. The Confederate Army would be paroled so that no leaders could be tried and hanged for treason; officers could retain their swords; and officers and soldiers could keep their horses. When asked about this generosity, Grant simply replied, "Lee would have done the same for me had he won."

Grant described the surrender:

> General Lee was dressed in a full uniform which was entirely new, and was wearing a sword of considerable value, very likely the sword which had been presented by the State of Virginia; at all events, it was an entirely different sword from the one that would ordinarily be worn in the field. In my rough traveling suit, the uniform of a private with the straps of a lieutenant-general, I must have contrasted very strangely with a man so handsomely dressed, six feet high and of faultless form. But this was not a matter that I thought of until afterwards.

Modest in demeanor, ferocious in warfare, yet magnanimous in victory, General Ulysses S. Grant, in slightly more than one year, oversaw final Northern victory, assured the reelection of a President dedicated to prosecuting the war vigorously, and began implementing Lincoln's policy of compassionate treatment of the fallen South that would once more weld this country into "one nation...with liberty and justice for all."

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CHRONOLOGY OF GENERAL U. S. GRANT
APRIL 27, 1822 -- JULY 23, 1885

Based on a Chronology compiled by
General Sir James Marshall-Cornwall from
Grant as a Military Commander, Van Nostrand, 1970.

April 27, 1822	Hiram Ulysses Grant born in Ohio
June 14, 1839	Mix-up in name registers Ulysses Simpson Grant as West Point cadet
July, 1843	From West Point, Grant commissioned in 4th Infantry
March, 1846	Mexican War begins
September 13, 1847	Grant promoted on battlefield to Brevet Captain
February 2, 1848	Mexican War ends
August 22, 1848	Grant marries Julia Dent
March, 1852	Grant's regiment ordered to California
July 31, 1854	Grant resigns Army commission
October 16, 1859	John Brown's raid
November 6, 1860	Lincoln elected
April 12, 1861	Civil War starts
April 23, 1861	Grant rejoins Army at Springfield, Ill.
June 17, 1861	Grant promoted to Colonel
August 7, 1861	Grant promoted to Brigadier-General
February 6, 1862	Grant captures Ft. Henry (Tenn.)
February 16, 1862	Grant captures Ft. Donelson and is promoted to Major-General of Volunteers
April 6-7, 1862	Grant and Buell defeat Johnston and Beauregard at Shiloh

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2-2-2-2
GRANT CHRONOLOGY

July 11, 1862	Grant appointed by Lincoln to command Armies of Tennessee and Mississippi
October 3-4, 1862	Grant defeats Van Dorn at Corinth, Miss.
October 16, 1862	Grant takes command of the Department of Tennessee
January 1, 1863	Emancipation Proclamation
July 1-4, 1863	Battle of Gettysburg
July 4, 1863	Vicksburg falls to Grant; Grant promoted to Major-General
November 24-25, 1863	Battle of Chattanooga; Grant defeats Bragg
March 3, 1864	Lincoln brings Grant to Washington to command Union Army
March 9, 1864	Grant promoted to Lieutenant General
May 4-6, 1864	Wilderness Battle between Grant and Lee in Virginia
May 9-19, 1864	Battle of Spotsylvania, Va.
June 1-3, 1864	Lee repulses Grant at Cold Harbor
July 30, 1864	Petersburg mine crater attack fails
November 8, 1864	Lincoln re-elected
February 9, 1865	Lee appointed Commander of all Confederate forces
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April 9, 1865	Lee surrenders at Appomattox
April 14, 1865	Lincoln assassinated
November 4, 1868	Grant elected President
November 4, 1872	Grant re-elected President
July 25, 1885	Grant dies after completing Memoirs

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CIVIL WAR DRILL 12

A TYPICAL CIVIL WAR GUN BATTERY LINES UP FOR DRILL BEFORE GOING INTO ACTION AGAINST THE CONFEDERATE FORCES. MATTHEW BRADY, WHO MADE AN EXTENSIVE COVERAGE OF THE WAR, LEFT THIS PHOTOGRAPH FOR THE HISTORICAL RECORDS.

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SUPPLIES FOR GENERAL GRANT

THE NAVIGABLE WATERS OF VIRGINIA WERE IDEAL FOR LANDING SUPPLIES USED BY GENERAL GRANT IN HIS SOUTHERN CAMPAIGNS. HERE ARMY PERSONNEL UNLOAD EQUIPMENT ON THE JAMES RIVER, DESTINED FOR CITY POINT, VIRGINIA.

(PHOTO BY MATTHEW BRADY)

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SC 113748
Grant's headquarters at Cold Harbor, Va.

OFFICIAL U. S. ARMY PHOTO (RELEASED)

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PETERSBURG OFFENSIVE

HERE UNION FORCES ARE SHOWN TAKING THE OFFENSIVE AGAINST THE CONFEDERATE ARMY, DURING THE FIGHTING AT PETERSBURG, VIRGINIA, JUNE 21, 1864.

(PHOTOGRAPH BY MATTHEW BRADY)

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BATTLE OF PETERSBURG

A UNION BATTERY LINED UP IN BREASTWORKS AT THE BATTLE OF PETERSBURG, VIRGINIA, 1864.
(AN ORIGINAL PHOTOGRAPH BY MATTHEW BRADY, PRESERVED IN THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES)

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PETERSBURG-1865

BATTLE WEARY SOLDIERS TAKE A BREAK IN THE TRENCHES FOLLOWING THE FIGHTING AT PETERSBURG, VIRGINIA.

1865. (PHOTO BY MATTHEW BRADY, FROM NATIONAL ARCHIVES)

UNION CASUALTY

A UNION SOLDIER WOUNDED IN BATTLE IS GUARDED BY A COMRADE AT A DESERTED CAMP. THIS GREAT HUMAN INTEREST PICTURE IS THE WORK OF MATTHEW BRADY, WHO LEFT THE MOST EXTENSIVE PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORD OF THE CIVIL WAR.

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SC 320487

CAPTURED EQUIPMENT-GENERAL GRANT'S FORCES CAPTURED THESE GUNS AND OTHER EQUIPMENT DURING THE FALL OF RICHMOND, VIRGINIA, IN 1865.

~~VIRGINIA.~~

Signal Corps Photo. (Copy of B-76 by Matthew Brady) Released by Pub. Info. Div. for Army Day 6 April 1949.
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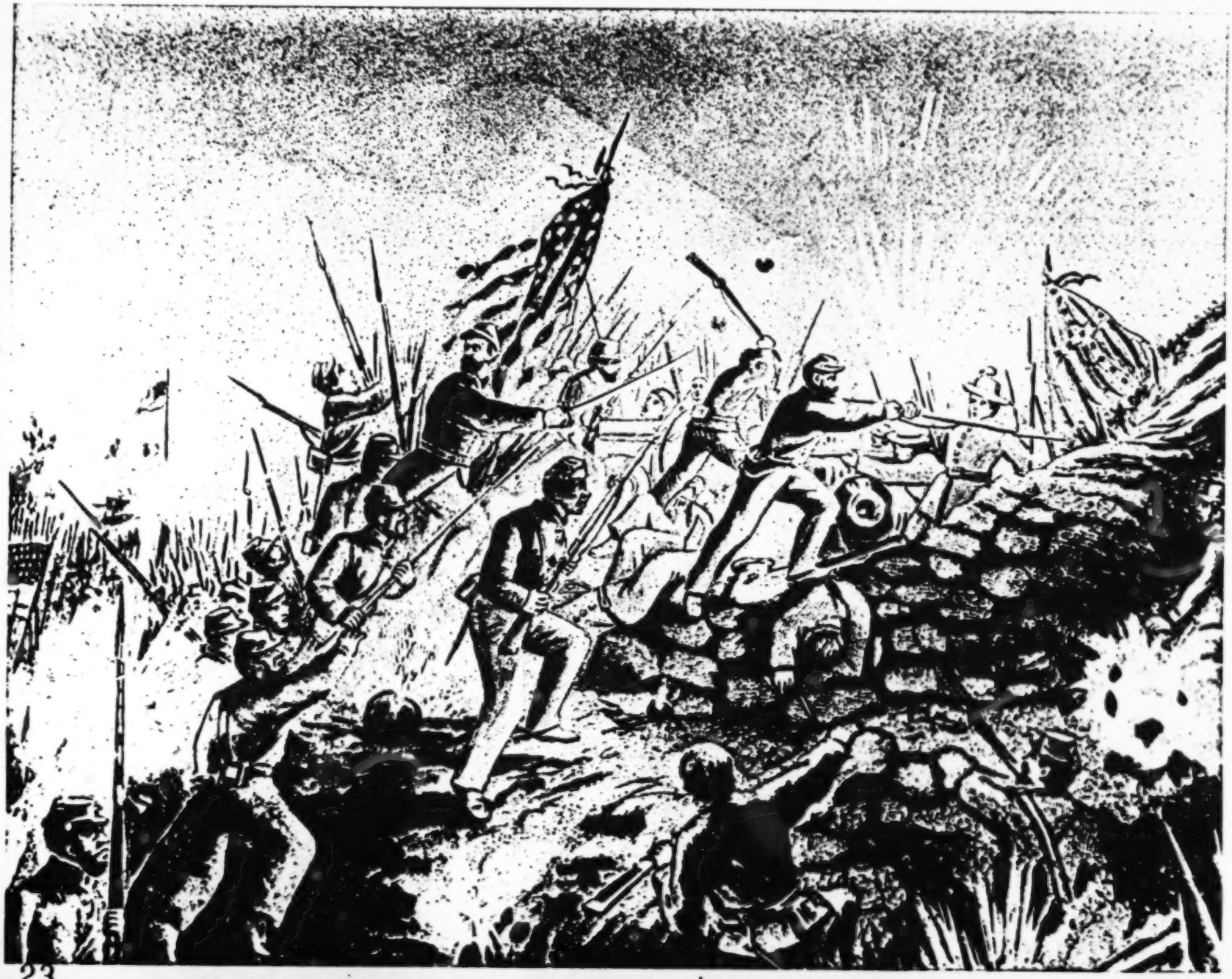

The charge at Fort Wagner by the 54th Massachusetts regiment was led by Colonel Robert Shaw, who was killed during the assault and buried with his troops.

(Credit 64-M-192 National Archives)

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General Robert E. Lee signing the surrender. Sketch from Dr. Ryder's collection, photographed by Signal Corps, 2nd Corps Area, through negotiations made by Captain Davis Jones, Infantry.

Art representations by James Edward Kelly.

Brady Archives 2264 in National Archives.

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